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ABSTRACT

The College Board's Future Directions for a Learning Society (FDLS) program has increasingly focused on improving access and transition for adult learners. The "learning society" is a name for what is happening and for an ideal. The challenge is to build bridges from what is to what could be. Although over seventeen million adult Americans participate in organized education or learning activities, the needs for education and educational services remain great. To meet some of these needs, the FDLS has initiated a program (1) to make projections of future societal trends and needs that have implications for adult learning, (2) to disseminate information on the needs of adult learners and of agencies, institutions, and others that serve them, (3) to promote improved public policy and public understanding about lifelong learning, and (4) to establish services to improve adult access and transitions to learning opportunities. (CSS)

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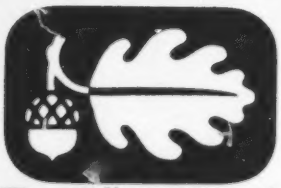
Future Directions for a Learning Society



The College Board

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

College Entrance Examination Board, New York, 1978

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What is FDLS?

The Future Directions for a Learning Society (FDLS) *program is a major effort toward the realization of a learning society in the United States. The program focuses on improving access and transition for learners, which has been the Board's role in education for more than 75 years. By building on recent Board programs that have increasingly focused on adults, the program extends this historic role to include assistance to adult learners and to the diverse agencies, institutions, and organizations that provide learning opportunities for them.*

Funded by the Exxon Education Foundation, FDLS *develops consensus and support for strategies, services, and policies that can best meet current and projected needs of participants and providers in a learning society. To this end, the program solicits and relies on the participation of professional people in the field, public policymakers, and the larger community. A major purpose of the Exxon grant is to promote the mobilization of additional funds and other resources necessary for major initiatives in this developing field. The initial grant supports the project's planning and management, the identification and design of service areas, the review and analysis of public policy, and publishing of relevant materials.*

The program will produce projections of future trends, information about the needs of learners and providers of educational opportunities and resources, policy recommendations, and services. The program is engaged in finding better ways to gauge the needs of learners, in identifying the problems institutions face in meeting learners' needs, in strengthening learning opportunities, and in increasing public, professional, and political understanding of the field. A chief focus of the program is to demonstrate promising new approaches and specific services.

The conception of individual fulfillment and lifelong learning finds no adequate reflection in our social institutions. For too long we have paid pious lip service to the idea and trifled with it in practice. If we believe what we profess concerning the worth of the individual, then the idea of individual fulfillment within a framework of moral purpose must become our deepest concern, our national preoccupation, our passion, our obsession.

John Gardner

Future Directions for a Learning Society

A "learning society" is one of the oldest ideas in education. Creating it in America today is one of the newest.

The Greeks spoke of *paedeic* society and culture conceived as an environment for the lifelong growth of an individual. Today, the idea has taken hold of our imagination again, after an era in which people commonly thought of "learning" in relation to just one institution: the formal educational system. "Not I, but the city, teaches," said Socrates. Today we are glimpsing this truth anew.

For several decades educators have been stirred by a vision of a society whose citizens would have, throughout all of their lives, opportunities to expand their minds, enrich their spirits, provide for their personal and career needs, and contribute to the common good. In recent years the excitement has spread to include policymakers and leaders in business, labor unions, government, and other sectors of society.

Yet the image of the learning society has remained vague – no one really knows what future direction should be taken to reach it.

This is quite natural. Whenever a fresh ideal grips our imagination, observed Alfred North Whitehead in *The Aims of Education*, it presents itself first as romance, and only later with precision. The learning society is such an ideal in America today.

We are now challenged to advance from general affirmation and enthusiasm – Whitehead's exhilarating but transitory stage of romance – to the maturer stage of precision. The general concepts and goals of the learning society must, to become effective in changing people's lives, be made more precise. They must be better and more widely understood, reflected in public policy, and translated into institutional and personal practice. We have much to learn about the learning society: about how it is being created, about what it would become, about the roles available for us and our institutions (especially those of higher education), about the specific activities, programs, and services needed by learners and by institutions, and about how to win broad public participation and support.

The learning society, therefore, is a name for both what is happening, and for an ideal. The challenge is to intervene in this process of becoming, to discern accurately what is already happening, why, and how; to project what will, could, and should happen; and to build the bridges from the former to the latter.

What is happening? With astonishing suddenness, we have become aware of numerous new activities. A quick way to sense how rapidly these changes have come about is to consider the number of terms that have come into educational discourse during the past 10 years, new names for new activities or concepts: educational brokering, experiential learning, external degree, nontraditional study, open learning, contract learning, functional competence, *education permanente*, recurrent education, sandwich learning, nonformal learning, andragogy, the learning force, adult independent learner, postsecondary education, free university, university without walls, learning exchange, educational network, weekend college, mentor, facilitator, enabler, advocate, delivery system, national media course, course by newspaper, and so on.

The volume of educational activity in America indicates rapidly rising expectations among adults for further learning opportunities. Forty million adult Americans are in career transition, the majority of whom expect to return to some form of education or training. Most of our adult population is believed to be involved in independent learning projects. More than 17 million adult Americans have been identified by the National Center for Education Statistics as being in organized educational or learning activities associated with their jobs, their churches, colleges or universities, or other private or public agencies. Some estimates indicate that more than 30 percent of the people in the work force have fringe benefits to support advanced learning, although most of these go unused.

Equally significant are the facts reported recently by the United States Office of Education that less than half the nation's adults possess the basic skills needed to function well in society. More than 20 percent of them are barely able to read want ads in newspapers or balance a checkbook. Thus, the major prospects and problems of a learning society are already at hand. When the history of higher education in our time is written, one of the major paradoxes that may be described is that we spent so much time bewailing "declining demand" at the very moment that opportunity existed for the greatest expansion in educational services that had ever occurred.

Priorities for future action include:

- Better definitions of social and demographic conditions that influence adult learning
- Increased equity for all learners
- Public policies supportive of adult learners
- Better information services for prospective learners
- Improved training for managers, planners, policymakers, counselors, and faculty members
- Better descriptions of learner needs, lifelong learning behavior, and target groups
- Increased support for independent, self-directed learners
- More collaboration between and among all classes of providers—postsecondary education institutions, businesses, industrial organizations, cultural agencies, and the mass media
- New methods of learning assessment and certification
- Better linkages between learners and learning opportunities
- More effective coordination of resources, both public and private
- New definitions of mission, and role, and forms of institutional organization

To take appropriate advantage of these opportunities, it will be necessary for every agency, institution, and organization concerned with human development to address the basic questions that exist. For us at the College Board, the questions include:

1. What are the implications for adult learning of emerging developments in society?

2. What are the present and probable future needs of adult learners and of the institutions that serve them?

3. What public policies for and public attitudes toward adult learning are desirable and how can they be created?

4. What activities, programs, and services are needed to maximize adults' utilization of new learning opportunities?

The program's basic purposes are to:

Make projections of future societal trends and needs that have implications for adult learning

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Disseminate information on the needs of adult learners and of agencies, institutions, and others that serve them

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Promote improved public policy and public understanding about lifelong learning

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Establish services to improve adult access and transitions to learning opportunities

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Make projections of future societal trends and needs that have implications for adult learning

Explore alternative futures and their implications for learning. What is the shape of the American future? How will the society change between now and the year 2000—in the ways people work, live, behave, communicate with one another, and govern themselves? Only by discerning the most probable and important changes can we begin to conceive and create appropriate learning opportunities.

As its initial inquiry in this area, the FDLS program is conducting a national study of trends and goals in a learning society. Decision-makers in key sectors will pool their perceptions about anticipated major changes, and the learning goals most relevant to them. The findings will be incorporated in the program's design and in the identification of the new services likely to be needed. The survey design will be made available nationwide to groups, institutions, and agencies that wish to develop information on a regional or local basis.

The program will continue to keep planners informed about emerging trends and goals, alterting them to new opportunities.

Identify needed research in adult learning and conduct selected research studies. How children learn has been exhaustively studied, but not much is known about the learning of adults. Yet solid progress toward a learning society must rest on a growing body of knowledge.

The FDLS program's advisory panel on research has prepared a research agenda on lifelong learning. Its purpose is to identify important gaps in research as a guide for individual investigators and for funding sources, including government agencies and private foundations, that might support their work.

Several conferences planned by FDLS will contribute to this field of knowledge. The first will explore present conditions in the 12 major areas delinated in the research agenda, summarizing what is now known about adult learning. The second will distill data from other disciplines that will illuminate adult learning from physical, social, and political perspectives.

The program currently supports several research projects whose findings will be used to design needed services and to help in developing the program's policy positions.

Improved information will thus be made available to researchers and managers on the deployment of limited resources to achieve maximum impact. By encouraging better communication among practitioners, the FDLS program hopes to reduce redundancy and encourage consensus on problems of first concern.

Disseminate information on the needs of adult learners and of agencies, institutions, and other organizations that serve them

Investigate how and what adults are learning now, and delineate their likely future learning needs and preferences. National attention has increasingly focused on the learning needs of adults, and on deciding what policies and practices should be developed to meet them. A vigorous dialogue ensues as these topics take a higher place on the national agenda.

The FDLS program informs the discussion and clarifies the debate by disseminating important information and describing various points of view. One report reveals that 40 million Americans think of themselves as being in career transition. Another explores the "missing link" between adult learners and learning resources. Another investigates the reasons why some groups of people participate in adult education and learning activities much more than do others.

The FDLS program will explore the needs and interests of adults through a new investigation of Americans in transition. Recognizing that people make many transitions during their lifetimes, the series will explore what causes adults to seek learning opportunities and how, when, and where their needs are now being met.

Identify current policies, practices, and future plans of those who provide adult learning opportunities. A major purpose of the FDLS program is to help those who would serve adult learners, such as postsecondary educational institutions, businesses, industrial organizations, labor unions, libraries, museums, and media representatives. But much more needs to be known about what is already available, and what providers plan for the future.

The FDLS program is trying to determine what obstacles institutions foresee as they expand their services. Among the areas being surveyed are recruitment, assessment of prior learning and placement of students, governance, marketing, evaluation, learning strategies, and the future plans of institutions. The findings should establish a data base on which the design for services to help institutions reach their goals can be built. An initial publication in this area describes more than 300 ways colleges are currently serving adult learners.

Through a series of regional dialogues on potential collaborative relationships, representatives from postsecondary institutions and from business and industry will discuss how, together, they can best serve adult learners.

Recognizing still other critical providers of adult learning opportunities, an analysis of the future needs and initiatives of the mass media (television, newspapers, book publishers) to serve adult learners is planned.

Promote improved public policy and public understanding about lifelong learning

Increase public and professional understanding of adult learning and the learning society. The work of creating a learning society in the United States is a task for many. Communication—among professionals, to the public, with policymakers—is essential. The FDLS program en-

courages improved communications through conferences, consultations, and publications.

The program's first publication, "Toward a Learning Society," completed in collaboration with the Adult Education Association of the United States, analyzed challenges facing adult educators that had been defined at a recent National Adult Continuing Education Conference.

The first conference sponsored by FDLS brought together state planners of Educational Information Centers. In collaboration with the Education Commission of the States, the National Center for Educational Brokering, and the Institute for Educational Leadership, the FDLS program oriented state planners to functions appropriate for such centers and currently available resources. Future conferences are planned that will deal with information systems, emerging developments in the assessment of adult learning, and international trends in developing services for access and transition. A series of regional forums will bring together key figures in the development of a learning society—representatives from educational institutions, the military services, business organizations, labor unions, community agencies, and other groups—to discuss why and how they should cooperate to provide broader opportunities for learning.

The use of the mass media will be critical in raising public consciousness—a major emphasis of the FDLS program. Newspaper columns, articles, and public service announcements are but a few examples of the various techniques being explored.

Within the lifelong learning movement, the program seeks continually to join in collaborative efforts with other leading groups that seek to broaden opportunities and services for adult learners.

Provide guidance on the formation of public policy. A new era of government involvement in lifelong learning is beginning, and leaders in public life have asked to hear from interested parties as they formulate state and federal policies. The FDLS program, working in conjunction with the Washington offices of the College Board and other agencies and associations, will promote widespread discussion of proposed policies, and hope to achieve consensus and support for desirable developments. The program will give special attention to

public policy issues concerned with equality of opportunity for adult learners, improved information dissemination, issues concerning learning assessment, the development of delivery systems, adult learning financing, and the needs of institutions of higher education.

Policy papers. The FDLS program will, from time to time, issue reports, statements, and papers on major public policy issues in relation to access, transition, assessment, and institutional development.

In its policy statement, the program will address matters that:

- Affect the quality and quantity of information that is available about learning opportunities for adults
- Assure increased realization of equality of opportunity for adult learners
- Achieve broader understanding and coherence in matters related to testing and other techniques of learning assessment
- Strengthen and extend new arrangements and systems for the offering of learning opportunities to adults
- Foster greater access to public sources of financial aid for adult learners
- Identify and support appropriate roles for higher education institutions in serving the future needs of adult learners

Establish services to improve adult access and transitions to learning opportunities

Design services that assist adult learners in gaining access and making transitions to various educational opportunities, and help providers meet new demands for adult learning opportunities. The complexity of today's society means that people have myriad opportunities, but are confronted with myriad decisions. As the true learning society develops, it will demand new kinds of solutions to new kinds of problems of access and transition – traditional concerns of the College Board.

The areas in which the FDLS program is designing services include:

- Educational and career planning information
- Decision-making programs
- Financial assistance information
- Learning assessment
- Credit granting and certification
- Transfer and transcript services
- Community and learning needs assessment
- Program planning and development
- Professional growth and development
- Program evaluation

FDLS is preparing a newspaper for adults that will provide facts about educational opportunities, give advice and encouragement to those interested in further learning, and also present comparative information on costs, curriculums, financial aid, and other related topics. The newspaper will be circulated to educational institutions, businesses, museums, libraries, labor organizations, and other groups that reach adults.

FDLS is also examining financial assistance information services for adults in order to produce a document that will help adult students plan to meet the costs of their education. It will list resources, for example: employer tuition aid programs, and federal and state loans, and discuss other key factors in gaining support for various learning programs.

FDLS is collaborating with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems in developing materials that providers can use to analyze their organizational capabilities, and to assess community needs and interest in lifelong learning. These materials will help providers to design their programs realistically.

Demonstrations FDLS plans to undertake include:

- Model career information centers for adults in special settings—(four-year institutions and industrial plants, for example)
- New activities of community-based institutions, such as museums, libraries, and churches, to support self-directed learning programs by adults
- Self-assessment and goal setting programs and materials for adult learners
- An information center on the assessment of adult learning
- A national institute in lifelong learning for administrators
- Learning-teaching exchanges in various community settings

Demonstrate new services that will assist adult learners in transition and assist providers in meeting new demands for learning opportunities. In its second and third years of operation, the FDLS will initiate or extend services needed by adult learners. In some cases the need for a new service will be implied by research results; in others, by a promising pilot project that needs widespread testing; and in still others by a successful demonstration project that calls for broad dissemination and replication.

The results will be new programs and services for permanent operation as ongoing responsibilities of the College Board, after such programs and services have demonstrated value as significant advances both for adult learners and the providers of adult learning opportunities.

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Project Consultants and Advisory Panels

Expert advice is sought as needed from sources that include research specialists, educators, government policymakers, and administrators. The program commissions numerous and varied individuals and groups to carry out special assignments. Panels established include:

- Research Advisory Panel
- Advisory Panel on Societal Trends and Goals for a Learning Society
- Advisory Panel on Communication
- Advisory Panel on Americans in Transition

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The College Board is a nonprofit association of over 2,400 schools and school systems, colleges and universities, associations, and scholarship agencies. Known to millions of college aspirants for its testing activities, the College Board also fosters programs in student financial aid, guidance, decision-making, course placement and academic credit, and research.

Although the College Board is best known for its series of college admissions and financial aid services, it has developed the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP), an adult-oriented service that now reaches about 400,000 yearly, and developed the first national directory of accredited courses open to adults *(The New York Times Guide to Continuing Education in America,* 1972). From 1971 to 1975, the College Board was cosponsor of the Commission on Nontraditional Study, whose findings were published under the title, *Diversity by Design.* The Board also coordinated the efforts of libraries throughout the nation in offering educational and counseling services to adults (The Library Independent Study and Guidance Projects). In 1975, the College Board completed a study for the National Institute of Education on education and work linkages. The report of this research project, entitled *Bridging the Gap: A Study of Education-to-Work Linkages,* was published by the College Board and contained a supplementary section with the model programs linking school and work. In 1976 the College Board carried out a survey of adult career counseling needs on behalf of the National Institute of Education that included a detailed analysis of the types of information, guidance, training, and counseling services desired by a cross section of American adults.

Future Directions for a Learning Society Publications available

September 1978

Arbeiter, Solomon, Aslanian, Carol B., Schmerbeck, Frances A., Brickell, Henry M., 40 *Million Americans in Career Transition: The Need for Information.* New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1978, 64 pages, $4.50

The detailed findings of a survey of the career transition needs of a representative sample of adults who were either undergoing or anticipating job or career changes. Survey interviews identified career and educational information needs, reasons for seeking change, and personal and demographic characteristics. This publication is useful to adult education professionals in both the public and private sectors and to others concerned with providing services to people who are in transition.

Arbeiter, Solomon, Aslanian, Carol B., Schmerbeck, Frances A., Brickell, Henry M., *Telephone Counseling for Home-Based Adults.* New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1978, 80 pages, $4.50

Highlighting the findings of a followup study of former home-based clients serviced by a telephone counseling project in Providence, Rhode Island, this study was designed to assess clients' satisfaction with the service, their success in following through on subsequent education or career decisions, and to record any unexpected outcomes or difficulties.

Cross, K. Patricia, *The Missing Link: Connecting Adult Learners to Learning Resources.* New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1978, 79 pages, $4.50

An exploration of the "missing link" between the interests of adult learners and the learning resources of society, this publication is based primarily on the results and recommendations of 30 state surveys of adult learner needs and on various research reports of adult self-planned learning efforts. Dr. Cross suggests that supplying the missing link will necessitate easing access to learning resources, disseminating information about learning opportunities, and providing counseling and referral services.

Future Directions for a Learning Society Advisory Panel on Research Needs in Lifelong Learning During Adulthood, *Lifelong Learning During Adulthood: An Agenda for Research.* New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1978, 59 pages, $4.50

In response to the increasing need for research in the field of adult learning, the panel's report focuses on four main areas: adult learners, providers of learning opportunities, the social context in which lifelong learning occurs, and the interactions of learners, providers, and society. The panel identifies important gaps in research and provides a guide for the use of researchers and those who fund research studies.

Gross, Ronald, *Toward a Learning Society: Adult Educators Engage a World of Challenge*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1978, 8 pages. Reprinted from *Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years*, January 1978.

An interpretive report of the 1977 National Adult Continuing Education Conference of the Adult Education Association of the United States (AEA/USA) and the National Association for Public Continuing and Adult Education (NAPCAE).